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TRANSCRIPT

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SUBJECT Future of U. S. Intelligence: Part One

BROADCAST EXCERPT

MARGARET WARNER: Finally tonight, we begin a series of conversations on the future of U.S. intelligence. Now that the Cold War is over, the role, the cost and the quality of intelligence-gathering and analysis are at issue again, as the Central Intelligence Agency awaits its next new Director. The President has nominated retired Air Force General Michael Carns for the job.

We start our own look at the future of U.S. intelligence with a former Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York.

Good evening, Senator. Thanks for being with us this evening.

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Margaret.

WARNER: In 1986 the CIA awarded you the Seal Medallion, the highest award it gives to anyone outside the agency. This year you've introduced legislation to abolish the CIA. Why?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Well, we could start by saying the Cold War is over and we ought to rethink our institutions.

And let me say, I treasure that medal. That's what it is. I have worked with the CIA in the field as an ambassador. I've seen acts of great courage, great skill.

In 1975 I was our U.N. Ambassador, and at that time the highest-ranking Soviet official ever, Arkady Shevchenko, who was the Undersecretary of the U.N. for Political Affairs, defected to the United States. He was on anyone's short list to succeed Gromyko. The defection was handled beautifully. It was done with

the greatest professional skill.

But then you come to the question of why didn't it occur to enough people that if someone that high up in the Soviet government wanted to defect to us, things might not be going so well in the Soviet Union. This question was asked very nicely, very forthrightly, like an admiral ought to ask, you can say, by Stansfield Turner, who was the Director of the CIA under President Carter. This was an article in Foreign Affairs in 1991 and it was called "Intelligence for a New World Order." And I'd like to just quote. He said, "We should not gloss over the enormity of our failure to forecast the magnitude of the Soviet crisis." Their economy was collapsing and their polity would break apart. He said there are some revisionist rumblings that, well, we thought it, we saw it, he said. But no. No, no. He said, "On this one, our corporate view missed by a mile." And he says, "Why were there so many of us so insensitive to the inevitable?"

And I have a working theory, which is it's the problem of secrecy. When estimates are made in secret, estimates that -- you know, not operational details that need to be secret, but big estimates, like: How's an economy doing? -- you never correct mistakes, and you can get yourself into compounding error, to an enormous degree.

Richard Reeves' new book on -- a biography of Kennedy reports that when Kennedy came to office, one set of government growth projections, based on CIA estimates, indicated that the gross national product of the Soviet Union would be triple that of the United States by the year 2000.

WARNER: Well, Senator, your bill would put the intelligence-gathering functions of the CIA into either the State Department or the Defense Department. Why would these agencies be any better at intelligence-gathering and analysis than the CIA?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Well, first of all, they don't have this legacy of having been so wrong which they would have to protect. I think that matters.

May I say, three years before the Berlin Wall came down, the agency projected per-capita GDP in East Germany to be higher than West Germany. Any Berlin taxi driver could have told you, "Nnnnno. I don't think so." But the computer model said.

And one of the problems with that sort of inside secrecy is, for instance, I remember Walt Rostow, head of policy planning at the State Department, in 1962 saying, you know, "I'm not one of these five-percent-forever people," which the Soviet Union was going to be growing for five percent forever. That means it would

grow by seven times in forty years. But if you talked to most any President and you said, "Mr. President. You know, I think the Soviet Union is going to pieces," he'd say to himself, "He's a nice fellow. He means right. He means well. A nice girl. Means well. But he just doesn't know what I know."

Now, there's a second and much larger point...

WARNER: Excuse me. Let me interrupt you there.

So you're saying there's sort of a culture of, what, bred by the secrecy, that they know it all?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: It's a culture that they have developed models of behavior of foreign countries, particularly the Soviet Union, that just were totally wrong, led us into expenditures of our own that we never needed have made, left us unprepared for the breakup of the Soviet Union and without the resources to put to use in the aftermath.

Now, to your question: Why should it go to the State Department? Why should it go to the Defense Department?

On Defense, one reason. If you're in the military, the only person whose military intelligence you trust is someone else in the military, and particularly in your branch. I mean that's just human.

But the State Department is my great concern.

You remember when the Shah fell in Iran and everyone went running around saying, "Why didn't CIA see that coming?" No, no. The question is, why didn't the State Department see it coming? They had an embassy in Teheran. They had the run of the country. That's the State Department's job.

A few days ago here in Washington, in the Washington Post, a big article on why didn't we see the devaluation of the peso in Mexico, and there's a fuss goes on with some people in the CIA said, "Well, we saw it coming"; others say, "Well you didn't really emphasize it enough."

Why do you need an intelligence agency with secret operatives to figure out what's going on in a country to which you have complete access? That was the State Department's job.

WARNER: Well, Senator, are you saying that there is a diminished need for intelligence-gathering of all kinds now that the Cold War is over?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Yes, I am. If intelligence-gathering is designed to decide: Is this the day the nuclear war with the Soviet Union will break out?

Intelligence, good heavens, you know, intelligence is being good at your job. We have a State Department, we have a Defense Department. They have clear assignments, clear priorities, and they should be asked to do them. They should not -- it's their reports that should come to the President and they should be held responsible for their mistakes.

WARNER: But, Senator, critics of your idea say that there was a reason for establishing an independent intelligence agency -- namely, that State and the Defense Department have policymaking roles, and so there is a danger that intelligence analyzed or filtered through them might, consciously or subconsciously, simply be used to justify what they want to do, that there was a reason to have an independent agency.

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Right, Margaret.

Now here me on this. It's a President's job to assess the quality of information he gets. You can't institutionally create another body that will do it on its own. And inevitably, that other body, that neutral body acquired policies of its own, which it pursued on its own. We've heard this from Secretary of State after Secretary of Defense for 40 years now.

And I was here at the height of perhaps the most difficult, which was the Iran-Contra affair, when the CIA, without anybody but a very few people in the White House knowing it, mined harbors in Nicaragua, which was a violation of international law; then, when it was made public, moved into other ways of finding resources to help the Contras in Nicaragua. And a great crisis emerged.

Theodore Draper, in his recounting that, wrote, "If ever the constitutional democracy of the United States is overthrown, we now have a better idea of how this is likely to be done."

They ended up with policies of their own which were secret. And that's not good for democracy, it's not good for analysis.

WARNER: Senator, last summer, despite your desire to abolish the CIA, you did write that no President is going to get rid of the CIA, you wrote, "and the CIA will be with us a half-century from now."

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Oh yes. Government agencies are forever. I'm not saying we won't have a CIA. I'm saying we should rethink its role, its size, and also the responsibility of other agencies

in government that have become too dependent on analysis which has too little scrutiny from the outside.

WARNER: Well, that's just what I want to ask you about. If the CIA will be with us a half-century from now, what should be, in let's say the next decade, how should its role change? What are the threats that it should be analyzing and assessing?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Nuclear terrorism, primarily. There was a while there where they were going around saying we'll do industrial sabotage and steal the secrets of Soviet cabbage production. I mean, come, come, come. That's what you have a Commerce Department for.

WARNER: So, nuclear terrorism. Anything else? What about drug trafficking or...

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: In what sense is drug trafficking an issue that an agency created in the Cold War to deal with a genuine threat of nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union and a Soviet expectation that Marxist-Leninism would be the wave of the future, would take over the world, and for a period around 1960 you could believe that, as you looked at Red China and you looked at the Soviet Union and other places.

WARNER: Well, what kind of changes would it require in the CIA and in the 12 other intelligence agencies in the U.S. Government...

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: There are 12 other. Right.

WARNER: There are 12 other. In fact, the CIA is only ten percent of the intelligence budget. Isn't that...

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: That's right.

There's a rule, Margaret, which is that organizations in conflict become like one another. One of these days we're going to learn that the Job Corps has an intelligence bureau.

WARNER: [Laughter]

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: And the answer is, first of all, cut, cut, cut. Second of all, get military intelligence into the military, because that's the only -- the military won't use other people's intelligence. And I understand that. Get the State Department back as the lead agency for the analysis of foreign policy issues for the President of the United States and for the government thereof.

WARNER: And would that be your advice to the new Director of the CIA, General Carns? I mean, to follow that prescription?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: He's obviously a superb officer. I'd be more interested in what his judgment is when he gets his hands on the agency and has spent a year there.

WARNER: He is a military man and also is touted for his management skills. Do you think those are the right qualifications for this job? Is this what the agency needs right now?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Well, it needs less politicalization. It became hugely politicized and ought not to be.

Mind you, the military has different interests than we do, the internal stability of regimes. We're seeing an outbreak of ethnic conflict the world over which our institutions, preoccupied with Marxism-Leninism, never anticipated and with which we're not doing a very good job.

Look at the disaster in the Balkans. Look at Sarajevo. Look at Bosnia. Everything the U.N. Charter was meant to stand for is being shredded before our eyes.

WARNER: So do you think the greatest challenge facing, whether it's the new head of the CIA or our government in general in intelligence, is it a management challenge or is it a vision challenge?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: It is the latter, in the sense of understanding the dynamics of international politics right now, which are far more driven by ethnic conflict than they are by ideological conflict.

WARNER: And do you think U.S. intelligence agencies are up to the job right now?

SENATOR MOYNIHAN: Well, nobody's very good at it. But whatever it is, it's not a secret job. It is no secret that there are Serbs and there are Croats and there are Bosnians, that there -- Islam at the tectonic plates where Islam and Christianity break apart -- come into one another. The whole issue of Central Asia. The endless -- Rwanda. The endless ethnic conflicts of Africa. In Mexico you have an insurgency which is basically ethnic. It's Indians against the Spanish in Mexico. That kind of analysis.

WARNER: Senator, thank you so much. I'm afraid that's all the time we have, but thanks very much.